

*Warwick, NY* – U. S. Congressman John Hall (NY-19) issued a letter to the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service today asking the agency to stop the sale of a 156-acre property along the Wallkill River in Orange County because of concerns area farmers have about future use of the land parcel possibly impacting nearby farms.

Congressman Hall urged that sale of the property from its current owner, Hobby World Development, Inc., a New Jersey-based business, to the Tennessee Gas Company be delayed because “concerns of the local farming community have not been sufficiently addressed.” Tennessee Gas Company is purchasing the parcel, located on Oil City Road, in order to transfer the property to the National Wildlife Refuge as a required offset for use of property in a New Jersey refuge for a proposed gas line.

Meanwhile, owners of farms and members of the agricultural community in what is known as the “Black Dirt region” near the Wallkill River National Wildlife Refuge are worried that the transfer of the property may have a detrimental impact on their livelihood.

One suggested alternative to the sale arrangement involving Tennessee Gas has the property being transferred instead to the Orange County Land Trust, which would then enter into a stewardship agreement with the Refuge for enhancement and management of a 200-foot riparian buffer along the Wallkill River. The remaining land would be made available for agricultural use.

“The Black Dirt farmers have proven to be good stewards of this land along the Wallkill River, and that land should not go unused,” said Rep. Hall. “We should be helping these farmers make a living, rather than creating a land offset for a gas company to lay a pipeline through a wildlife refuge.”

In recent years, the Black Dirt farmers have endured several crop-threatening floods and severe storms, and Rep. Hall writes in his letter to the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service that “now is not the time to expand the Refuge further into the agricultural community.”

“This is a piece of property on which wildlife habitat and agriculture as land uses do not have to

be mutually exclusive,” said Karin Roux, director of stewardship and conservation for Orange County Land Trust. “In addition to wildlife habitat, the managed riparian buffer would enhance water quality of the Wallkill River and potentially mitigate the impact of small-scale flood events. Keeping the remainder in agricultural use would directly impact capacity for food production in the Hudson Valley.”

Paul Ruszkiewicz, president of the Orange County Vegetable Growers Association and chairman of the Wallkill Valley Drainage Improvement Association, said: “Local growers, especially those close to the refuge border have been concerned about the transaction which will further threaten our ability to earn a living.”

[To view the letter please click here](#)